

## Benjamin Russell to Eleazer Oswald, *Independent Gazetteer*, 4 December 1787

MR. OSWALD, It was expected by most people, that the enemies to the constitution proposed by the federal convention would employ every artifice which sophistry and ingenuity could conceive or invent, to prejudice the minds of the people against it:—But, Sir, it was not thought possible that to effect this purpose, those enemies would resort to falsehoods, and misrepresentations: However, events have proved that a certain class of men “*stick at nothing to carry a point.*”

One of these enemies, in the *Independent Gazetteer* of the 7th instant, has rashly attacked a note to a correspondent, inserted in the *Massachusetts Centinel* of October 10th, without previously making himself acquainted with the note, or design of it—and has by a partial and false quotation, endeavoured to mislead the public, and excite the popular odium against the printer of that paper.

A few days after the constitution was published in this town, an unknown person, sent for insertion, “some observations on the new constitution,” in which, after mentioning its being promulgated, and ushered into the town with the zeal of enthusiasm, is the following paragraph, viz. “But, fellow citizens! beware of this candied pill—under this specious covering lurks a deadly serpent, which like Aaron’s, will swallow up the liberties of your country!—Though it is presented to you as being recommended for your adoption, by a *Washington* and a *Franklin!* Beware of it—Their honest unsuspecting hearts have made them the dupes of a cunning, aristocratic majority! whose only object is *rule*, and whose only wish, your *subjection*—that thereby the host of idle expectants, the starvelings of the Cin—i, may riot in extravagance, supported by the hard earnings of our industrious citizens!” &c—This paragraph contains the essence of the piece.

Philadelphiensis says, “Russell, the printer of the *Massachusetts Centinel* has had the effrontery to insult the freemen of America, so far as to say ‘that aiming thereby to be just, he is determined not to give place to any piece against the new constitution, except the writer leaves his name to be made public if desired,’ “—and I say, that Philadelphiensis has had the *effrontery to insult the public*, by publishing as mine, what I never inserted—Respect for that public induces me to represent the matter in its true light.

Could a publication, Mr. Oswald, so replete with illiberal declamation, from we know not who, be otherwise considered than inadmissible?—If not, a note to *Lucius* became necessary—in which he was desired to leave his name with the printer, for these reasons, viz. Because those persons who had wrote in favor of the constitution had left their names to be made public, if desired—and to guard against the declamatory assertions and insinuations of emissaries, and hidden enemies to *any* form of government that they supposed beneficial to the United States—Then follows the clause which Philadelphiensis has misrepresented, viz. “The printer has only to say, that aiming thereby to be just, he is determined not to give place to them (the observations of *Lucius*) nor to like productions (productions replete with mere declamation and abuse) on the subject, except,” & In this light it was considered in this town—and thought a timely caution

against those, who secure, in not being known, even to the printer, would foist into our papers their assertions and falsehoods, to excite jealousy and mistrust—Which, though the *wise* would consider as too glaring to be hurtful, and too weak to merit an answer, yet the less informed would believe, and adopt as truth.—All other pieces against, or for the constitution, have met with a ready insertion, and had Philadelphiensis seen any one of the Boston papers, he never would have made the unqualified assertion, that “*the liberty of the press was wholly abolished in Boston.*” He may be assured that the presses are as free here as in Philadelphia—except he construes into a restraint, the duty on newspaper advertisements.

I agree with Philadelphiensis, “that it was not with the *author of Lucius*, that the freemen of Massachusetts had any thing to do, but with his *reasonings.*” But let me tell this writer, *Lucius* used no *reasonings* whatever—and the freemen of this state wanted none of his *abuse*.

But, Mr. Oswald, I have my doubts of Philadelphiensis’ sincerity—“Russell, he says, deserves to be born aloft by a mob, as an object of *hatred* and *contempt*,”—For what?—“For doing more *prejudice* to the new constitution, than its enemies can do by the violence of their *accusations*, however well they may be founded”—though to save appearances he afterwards calls it a “tyrannical government,” and prays Heaven to forbid its establishment.

If sincere in his “accusations,” though he might hug himself, in his fancied security, from the distance between this town and Philadelphia, and supposing himself, sheltered thereby, call to his support in attacking “the wisdom of our wise men”—misrepresentation and deceit—It is the duty of a freeman, to expose him, if discovered—To expose him therefore, and to convince the public of the deception, I have troubled you with this letter, which if inserted, will oblige Your very humble servant, B. RUSSELL.

*Boston*, 20th November, 1787.

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